

Return Address:

May 10, 1961

Leo Szilard
Hotel Dupont Plaza
Washington 6, D. C.

MEMORANDUM *

From: Leo Szilard

Reply by June 5th is requested

To: Dr. *Lederberg*

For the second time in my life I find myself drafting a petition to the President. The first petition was directed at President Truman and asked the President to rule -- on the basis of moral considerations -- against the dropping of atomic bombs on the cities of Japan.

The Germans may have been the first to bomb cities and to kill thousands of men, women and children, and early in the war they destroyed Rotterdam in order to force the speedy surrender of Holland. But as long as Germany was the only manifest offender, this type of warfare was generally regarded as an atrocity and an anomaly which would not be expected to recur if the war ended with the defeat of Germany. Subsequently Britain and America made this kind of warfare "respectable" by adopting it in the later phases of the war and by dropping an atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of the war.

Hiroshima made it impossible for America to assume the moral leadership after the war and effectively to press for the elimination of atomic bombs from the nation's armaments. Thus the planning for the strategic bombing of cities became standard operational practice soon after the last war ended.

At the present time the Administration is creating the impression that henceforth America may intervene in civil wars whenever this is necessary in order to prevent the establishment, or stabilization, of a Government that looks to the Soviet Union or China, rather than to America, for economic assistance and military protection. There

* This Memorandum is sent individually to members of the National Academy of Sciences, but its circulation is limited to the members of the Astronomy, Physics, Psychology, Botany, Zoology and Anatomy, Physiology, Pathology and Microbiology, as well as Biochemistry Sections

is no assurance that America would abide in such cases by the restraints imposed upon her by the United Nations Charter.

We transgressed the Charter when we engineered the unsuccessful invasion of Cuba by Cuban exiles. Still we were able to claim in this instance that we had exercised a measure of restraint because we had refrained from intervening with our own troops. But much of what we may have gained by this restraint we gave away soon thereafter by hinting that we might move into Cuba with our own troops if the other Latin American nations failed to cooperate with us in squashing Castro. Such intervention in Cuba with our own troops would be, of course, a flagrant violation of the United Nations Charter.

We would not be the first nation to try to settle a political issue by means of a direct military intervention in violation of the Charter. But hitherto people have generally looked upon such intervention as an evil which must be resisted, and in the past such violations were condemned by the great majority of the nations.

Should we, in the months to come, persist in threatening to intervene in civil wars in violation of the Charter, then we would thereby render military intervention of this sort "respectable" and in the years to come they might become standard operational practice.

Our recent role in the unsuccessful invasion of Cuba by Cuban exiles was placed in the proper perspective in a letter to the editor written by W. Friedmann, Professor of Law and Director, International Legal Research, Columbia University, printed in the May 1st issue of the New York Times. The text of this letter is attached.

As far as the Cuban issue is concerned, I personally rather share the views expressed in a statement drafted by members of the Harvard Faculty, which was printed as an advertisement in the May 10th issue of the New York Times.

Another aspect of the issue that concerns us here is stressed by Walter Lippmann in a column which is printed in the May 9th issue of the New York Herald Tribune. The relevant text of his column is attached also.

We scientists represent an insignificant fraction of the voters. But if we were to feel that the policies pursued by our Government are morally not justifiable, it would inevitably affect what we may or may not feel impelled to do. And what some of us may or may not do might very well have a major effect on the nation's future.

This being the case, the President is entitled to know whether or not the policies of his Administration offend our moral sensibilities, and I propose to transmit to the President your response to this memorandum and attached petition, provided I receive it by June 5th.

I have advised the President of the action I am taking and I am attaching a copy of the letter which I wrote to him.

* * *

My request to you is as follows:

- (a) If you agree with the thoughts expressed in the attached petition, sign it, fasten it at the edges with scotch tape or staples, and mail it to me;
- (b) If you prefer to write a letter to the President that you draft yourself, do so and either send me the signed original for transmittal, or else mail me a carbon copy of your letter;
- (c) If you are opposed to the views expressed in the attached petition, or if you are opposed to the purposes which it is meant to serve, write "Opposed" across the face of the petition, seal it at the edges, and mail it to me;
- (d) If you wish to abstain in this matter, write "Abstain" across the face of the petition, seal it at the edges and mail it to me.

- THE END -

C O P Y

May 10, 1961

President John F. Kennedy
The White House
Washington 25, D. C.

Dear Mr. President:

I am convinced that the next phase of the so-called atomic stalemate, which is now rapidly approaching, will be inherently unstable and may explode in our face the first time we get into a conflict with Russia in which major national interests are involved. Therefore, I believe it is imperative that we reach a meeting of the minds with the Russians on either how to live with the bomb or else how to get rid of the bomb. So far we have not been doing either.

On October 5th of last year I had an extended conversation with Chairman Khrushchev in New York from which I had gained an insight into the kind of approach to which the Russians might respond with respect to either of these two issues. I thought that what I had learned was important enough to ask you to see me in November before you took office, and it was with deep regret that I learned that this was not possible.

Private conversations which I had in Moscow last December lead me to doubt that the Russians would be very receptive at the present time to any discussions on controlled arms limitations. I believe that the attitude of the Russians in this regard might change but only if we were first to examine jointly with them the issues involved in general disarmament and would then jointly reach the conclusion either that general disarmament is not desirable, or else that it is desirable but not feasible.

Most Americans do not know at all whether they would want to have general disarmament, even if it were feasible. I personally am convinced

that we shall make no progress towards general disarmament unless we first reach a meeting of the minds with the Russians on how one would secure the peace in a disarmed world.

Recently I moved to Washington in order to discover if I might be of some use in connection with the problem that the bomb poses to the world. Because I found nobody who appeared to know how the peace may be secured in a disarmed world, I decided to concentrate on this issue.

I was in the process of preparing a memorandum which analyzes what may and what may not be possible in this regard when I was stopped in my tracks by the invasion of Cuba by Cuban exiles.

I am deeply disturbed by what appears to be the present attitude of your Administration towards our obligations under the United Nations Charter. How many of my colleagues share my misgivings I do not know, but I am writing individually to other members of the National Academy of Sciences, and I shall take the liberty to transmit to you the responses which reach me by June 5th. A copy of the memorandum which I am mailing to my colleagues is attached.

Yours very truly,

Leo Szilard
Hotel Dupont Plaza
Washington 6, D. C.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Lemmings vs. Air-borne Arks

By C. L. Sulzberger

PARIS, May 7 -- It almost seems as if there is some mystical race between man's resolve to destroy this world and his efforts to find lodgment on another planet.

On one hand, we find the heroic but still tentative voyages of Gagarin and Shepard. These are the first precursors of that celestial Noah's ark which, some inevitable day, will wobble into space and seek to perpetuate humanity on distant spheres.

On the other hand, the earth-bound remnants drive on adamantly, foolish as Scandinavian lemmings, toward what they apparently would make their doom. No one is qualified to prophesy the outcome of this contest between our constructive and destructive genius. Yet at least we can measure the march to terrestrial catastrophe.

The great powers are paralyzed by suspicion in their efforts to negotiate a halt to the nuclear weapons race. With evident reason we attribute this to Soviet blind stubbornness. Nevertheless, if continued, it will insure that the means for such terrestrial catastrophe are at hand for almost everyone.

Simultaneously the opposing blocs inch ever more terrifyingly up against each other's borders. Far from disengaging, they are increasingly engaging. Let us regard two trends.

The first is the prospect of sending American troops to South Vietnam and perhaps to Thailand -- as a consequence of the Laos collapse. The second is Castro's announcement that Cuba is now "Socialist." Consider these together.

President Kennedy thinks of stationing U.S. soldiers in Southeast Asia because of the Laotian breakdown of SEATO defense machinery. Clearly we wish to check the possibility that Communist dry rot may spread to neighboring lands.

SEATO Article Four specifies that "aggression by means of armed attack" will be met by alliance action. Yet armed aggression from North Vietnam, logistically supported by Russia, wasn't truly met because the Laotians themselves showed they simply couldn't care less.

Laos was never in SEATO. But it is unilaterally guaranteed protection under a special protocol applied to treaty Article Four. The points to be considered now are these: Must we put in troops or else risk losing Southeast Asia? And if we must, how will we ever get them out again?

Furthermore, how will China accept the presence of such forces, evidently with nuclear equipment, close to its southern border? Peiping contends that war is inevitable and even seems to relish the ghastly thought. The implications are too obvious to warrant further comment. But how is all this related to Castro's Cuba?

Here we must turn back the pages to a year ago when Marshal Malinovsky announced an arrogant new Soviet doctrine. He said Russian missiles, presumably with atomic tips, would be launched against the home base of any aircraft intruding over Socialist territory.

The key word is Socialist, which, of course, means Communist in Moscow's lexicon. Malinovsky said he had issued orders for such missile protection not only of Russian but of Socialist territory; and he didn't mean Sweden.

Now Castro proclaims that his is a Socialist state. Clearly this infers the kind of Socialism Khrushchev admires and Malinovsky boasts he will defend by holocaust. So Cuba now qualifies for the same kind of unilateral Warsaw Pact protection that Laos qualified for from SEATO.

This ought not to be taken to mean that necessarily and immutably, should aircraft intrude over Socialist Cuban skies from Guatemala or the United States, rockets would automatically whizz. But it also doesn't necessarily and immutably mean they wouldn't.

The world is again edging closer to war. And it is edging closer to total, not brush-fire, war. The hopes that, with skill and wisdom, both sides could begin to extricate themselves and establish at least a brush-fire peace, are dimming.

Therefore, the conceited atavist, concerned with man's general destiny, should pray that everyone will invest increasingly in endeavors to conquer space.

For if there is human logic --a dubious assumption-- it is only after telemetric signals have been received from some air-borne ark, announcing its safe arrival elsewhere in the universe with a cargo containing both male and female of the species; then and only then should the two great coalitions set about grimly honoring each and all their earthly commitments.

The New York Times, Monday, May 8, 1961.

LETTERS TO THE TIMES

The Kennedy Doctrine Policy Implications of President's Statement Are Examined

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NEW YORK TIMES:

The deeper implications of the Kennedy doctrine go far beyond Cuba. Only superficially can it be taken as a revival of the long-discarded Wilson doctrine that only democratically constituted governments can count on recognition by the United States. The present world is further than ever from the Wilsonian dream of democracy, and the withholding or withdrawal of recognition from all but democratically constituted governments would affect the majority of states, including many of this country's allies and friends.

The real meaning of the Kennedy statement is the affirmation of the supremacy of national interests and spheres of influence over the moral and legal restraints imposed by international law. This may be the result of a grim appraisal of the rapidly worsening international situation, and admission that only force, strategy and logistics can henceforth count in the struggle between the great power blocs. It may mean that America, no more than Russia or China, will tolerate in its own sphere of power a type of government that it distrusts. But the implications of such a doctrine should be realized.

The Communist powers have never been hampered in the use of force, which they can justify with the dialectics of revolution. But for at least half a century the United States has believed itself, and led the world to believe, in its image as a nation that will only fight, individually or collectively, against aggression, and in defense of international law. While often limiting freedom of action, this has given strength to the United States posture in international relations, among allies and neutrals. To sacrifice it would be a decision of grave and revolutionary importance.

Comparison With Hungary

Unilateral intervention designed to destroy by force a regime deemed hostile and dangerous to the United States would be on a par with Khrushchev's intervention in Hungary, suppressing a revolution whose success would undoubtedly have threatened the security of the Soviet regime, at least to the same degree as Castro's Cuba threatens

the security of the United States.

The Castro regime, however tyrannical, is not a puppet government. It came to power by a successful revolution, then acclaimed by most Americans. It will be far more difficult, if not impossible, for the United States henceforth to condemn Russians or Chinese for the actions in Hungary and Tibet, or the Franco-British intervention in Suez.

The Kennedy statement may signify a new and grimmer phase in United States policy, and the abandonment of its leadership in the fight for the rule of law in international affairs. It may be that the world situation justifies such a drastic reorientation, which may lead to the formation of tightly controlled superstates holding each other at bay. At least the implications of such a change should be clearly understood.

W. Friedmann,
Professor of Law and Director, In-
ternational Legal Research, Co-
lumbia University.
New York, April 25, 1961.

The New York Times, Monday, May 1, 1961.

TODAY AND TOMORROW

To Ourselves Be True

By Walter Lippmann

We have been forced to ask ourselves recently how a free and open society can compete with a totalitarian state. This is a crucial question. Can our Western society survive and flourish if it remains true to its own faith and principles? Or must it abandon them in order to fight fire with fire?

* * *

There are those who believe that in Cuba the attempt to fight fire with fire would have succeeded if only the President had been more ruthless and had had no scruples about using American forces. I think they are wrong. I think that success for the Cuban adventure was impossible. In a free society like ours a policy is bound to fail which deliberately violates our pledges and our principles, our treaties and our laws. It is not possible for a free and open society to organize successfully a spectacular conspiracy.

The United States, like every other government, must employ secret agents. But the United States cannot successfully conduct large secret conspiracies. It is impossible to keep them secret. It is impossible for everybody concerned, beginning with the President himself, to be sufficiently ruthless and unscrupulous. The American conscience is a reality. It will make hesitant and ineffectual, even if it does not prevent, an un-American policy. The ultimate reason why the Cuban affair was incompetent is that it was out of character, like a cow that tried to fly or a fish that tried to walk.

It follows that in the great struggle with Communism, we must find our strength by developing and applying our own principles, not in abandoning them. Before anyone tells me that this is sissy, I should like to say why I believe it, especially after listening carefully and at some lengths to Mr. Khrushchev I am very certain that we shall have the answer to Mr. Khrushchev if, but only if, we stop being fascinated by the cloak and dagger business and, being true to ourselves, take our own principles seriously.

* * *

TODAY AND TOMORROW

Post-Mortem on Cuba

By Walter Lippmann

Though it is late, it is, let us hope, not too late to find our way back to the highway from which we have strayed.

To do this there will have to be a certain inquiry, which only the President can conduct, followed by a frank and convincing explanation of how so colossal a mistake was made.

The question is how the President decided to approve this venture which was, as the event has shown, so greatly misconceived. As I understand it, and contrary to the general impression, there was no serious expectation that the landing of the exiles would be followed immediately by a political uprising against Castro. The object of the landing was to establish a beachhead for a civil war against Castro, and no plans seem to have been made, no thought seems to have been given, to what we would do then, what the rest of Latin America would do then, what the Soviet Union would do, while the civil war was being fought.

Bad as has been the consequences of the failure, they are probably less bad than would have been the indecisive partial success which was the best that could conceivably have been achieved. For in order to support the rebellion in Cuba we would have had to continue to violate not only our treaties with the other American states but also our own laws which prohibit the preparation of foreign military expeditions in the United States.

* * *

My own inquiries as to how the misjudgment was made lead me to believe that the President was not protected by the New Hands --Bundy, Rostow, Schlesinger and Rusk -- against the bad advice of the Old Hands, Bissell and Dulles of the C. I. A., Lemnitzer and Burke of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Berle of the State Department. There is no doubt that the plans had been drawn up and the preparations made during the preceding administration. There is no doubt that the President insisted upon modifying these plans to avoid, as he thought and hoped, any appearance of direct involvement of the United States Armed Forces. Though much has been said that this proviso ruined the plan, there is no doubt also that the Chiefs of Staff and the C. I. A. advised the President to proceed nevertheless.

I believe an inquiry will show that the Secretary of State, although he had his misgivings, approved the plan. Contrary to much that has been said, I believe it to be true that Stevenson and Bowles were excluded from the deliberations which preceded the fatal decision.

Furthermore, the record will show, I believe, that the one man who participated in the deliberations and pleaded with the President not to approve the plan was Sen. Fulbright. He foresaw what would happen, he warned the President that the right policy was not to attempt to oust Castro but to contain him while we worked constructively in Latin America. Sen. Fulbright was the only wise man in the lot.

* * *

When there is a disaster of this kind --as for example the British disaster at Suez -- the mistake can be purged and confidence can be restored only by the resignation of the key figures who had the primary responsibility and by candid talk which offers the promise that the mistake will not be repeated.

In the immediate wake of the disaster the President took the position that he would accept all the blame and that nobody else was to be held responsible. This was generous. It was brave, and in the sense that the Chief Executive must stand by those under him, it was right. But it is not the whole story. Under our system of government, unlike the

British system, the Chief Executive who makes a great mistake does not and cannot resign. Therefore, if there is to be accountability in our government, the President must hold responsible those whose constitutional or statutory duty it is to advise him.

All this is a painful business, even for a hardened newspaper writer. But the stakes are very high and the national interest is that the truth be found and that justice be done. For there is at stake the confidence of our own people and of our friends throughout the world.

New York Herald Tribune, Tuesday, May 2, 1961.

PETITION

To the President of the United States

Sir:

The unsuccessful invasion of Cuba by Cuban exiles and the statements which were subsequently made by spokesmen of your Administration have created the impression that henceforth the United States may intervene with her own troops in civil wars in order to prevent the establishment, or stabilization, of governments which look to the Soviet Union or China, rather than to America, for economic assistance and military protection. At present we lack assurance that the United States would in such a case abide by the restraints which are imposed by the United Nations Charter on all member nations.

When she ratified the Charter the United States renounced the right to resort to force in defense of her national interest except in circumstances which are set forth by the Charter.

In a rapidly changing world circumstances might conceivably arise where a nation might have to transgress the Charter and the transgression might appear justified in the eyes of the world. But even though it may not be possible to spell out in advance the circumstances in which a nation might be compelled to transgress the Charter, this does not mean that the Charter may be wantonly disregarded.

In deciding whether to use force, our Government must give due regard to the Charter and it must not adopt a double standard of morality; it must not apply one yardstick to the actions of the Soviet Union, England or France and another one to the actions of the United States.

I respectfully urge you

(a) to adopt a policy with respect to our obligations under the United Nations Charter which is in conformity with the moral and legal standards of behavior that we are demanding from others;

(b) by one means or another to assure the American people and the people of the world that such a policy has been adopted.

(Signed)

Date